Book Reviews

Margaret Rohdy, Editor

Designing Web Interfaces to Library Services and Resources. By Kristen L. Garlock and Sherry Piontek. Chicago: American Library Association, 1999. 103p. $40 (ISBN 0-83890-0742-3) LC98-37981.

Design Wise: A Guide for Evaluating the Interface Design of Information Resources. By Alison J. Head. Medford, N.J.: Information Today, 1999. 196p. $29.95 (ISBN 0-910965-31-5) LC98-43724.

Since the early 1990s, as the World Wide Web became the chief means of providing access to a larger variety of information resources, there has been a steep learning curve for presenting information on the Web in creative, intuitive, and meaningful ways. Web design has become easier as better editing instruments and tools give Web authors more options for layout and presentation. Good software alone, however, does not ensure good design. These two books, with different but complementary goals, are welcome additions to the proliferating literature for information professionals on how to design Web interfaces for various user communities.

Today most libraries have a Web site that provides access to a wide variety of library services, including digital resources and a gateway to the Internet. Garlock and Piontek have created a guidebook to show library staff how to maximize the Web for communicating with their user communities. They build on their 1996 book, a pioneer on this topic, *Building the Service-Based Library Web Site: A Step-by-Step Guide to Design and Options*. These authors, who have credible library experience as designers in the JSTOR (Journal Storage) digital archive project, emphasize creativity and listening to users' experiences to learn how the Web site functions for them—how they use it currently and anticipate using it in the future. If there is valuable content, insightful Web design will enhance the overall success of the Web site, but poor design will have a negative impact on the usability of the site, even when the content is valuable. As library users become more accustomed to navigating digital resources, they expect features and technical conveniences that make information retrieval from the Web more efficient and responsive to their needs. The authors assume that their readers are literate in HTML, and they conclude that most library Web sites are basically functional. They focus on how to make practical improvements that add excitement and uniqueness to a library Web site.

Library Web sites serve the combined functions of presenting an image for the organization and providing service to library users. There is an educational or instructional mission inherent in most library Web sites, because users need to be able to follow the layout of the Web site to retrieve information. Usually the goal is to reduce the need for external support to use the Web site successfully. Today a high level of sophistication and expectation surrounds Web design, with the potential for combining not only contextual layout, graphics, and color, but also mixed media and the opportunity for interaction via e-mail, interactive video, digital relay, and other options. Garlock and Piontek's chapter on new developments is not leading edge; they introduce the reader to only a few examples of techniques and technologies that are, in fact, not new at all. Adobe Acrobat, Shockwave, Flash and RealAudio, and JavaScripting have been in the forefront for several years. What Web managers really want to know is what technology is in the pipeline.

There are many books on how to create Web sites, but Garlock and Piontek's easy-to-use book is specific to the library environment. For libraries that have had several years' experience with their Web site, this book may be too basic. Those institutions may want to model the next generation of their Web site on e-commerce applications. The usefulness of this book depends on what kinds of services and resources the library wants to promote and how much experience they have in Web design. The book is organized in simple chapters on basic features of a Web site. There are many graphic examples to accompany the text; however their resolution suggests that this may be a good candidate for an e-book.

Two outstanding aspects of *Designing Web Interfaces* are the chapter on incorporating user feedback into the site design process and the one on site content. Soliciting user feedback on Web design demonstrates that the library wants to maintain its edge, cares what users think about this service, and expects to edit, revise, and make changes as needed. Good ideas

come from a variety of sources, and if one accepts the maxim that the customer is always right, then user input is essential. The goal is to have repeat users who expect a certain level of familiarity at the Web site and can use the site independently.

The richest chapter in *Designing Web Interfaces* is devoted to content. The authors cover in detail the variety of library resources and services and the relationships among online catalogs, commercial databases, local resources, and Internet access. They show the importance of such issues as restricted access, the wide variety of delivery options, explanations for printing and saving information, and the increasing need for client software to use some Web resources. One of the major challenges in creating a library Web site is establishing valuable links from one part of the site to another. Web sites have the potential to become denser and more complicated as more content becomes available, and good design takes the user to the relevant information with the fewest possible layers or clicks. There are many hints in this book and many cases and examples, however most Web development is a combination of individual preference and ease of use. There is valuable information in the appendix directing the reader to a range of resources on Web design. The cost of the book is surprising, though, given its brevity and the existence of many other books on this subject.

Design Wise is a different take on Web development. Alison Head stresses the need to rethink how Web sites are designed. She poses some difficult questions and offers ideas for change in this interesting book on software and Web development, providing a solid introduction to human-computer interaction (HCI) and showing how improvements can be made in designing interactive media.

This excellent book begins with the statement, "*Design Wise* is about making better choices" (xv). At the

conclusion, the reader will be prepared to do so with more ideas and knowledge. In the first part of the book, Head emphasizes design theory and in the second demonstrates how to apply it in designing Web sites. As a reference book, *Design Wise* includes many viewpoints, and the contextual framework is one with which anyone in the information industry—programmer, librarian, publisher, content provider, contributor, or user—can identify. As an information scientist herself, Head also incorporates several interviews with leaders and pioneer architects that make the process of Web design all the more real and legitimate. The brief interviews with Don Norman, Jakob Nielsen, Reva Basch, Peter Jacso, Lou Rosenfeld, and Anne Mintz are objective and inspiring. Head includes examples to support many hypotheses and ideas, from a variety of sources in different sectors. The inclusion of a range of educational sites, banking and commercial Web pages, those from the giants IBM and Microsoft, plus some not-so-good examples brings helpful insight into why HCI is so valuable in creating more user-centered Web designs. Head includes design evaluation templates based on accepted principles, but adds new focus to them by illustrating how interface design can be improved. As more diverse user groups emerge, Head considers how critical it is to design for users with special needs.

Design Wise is objective and creative in its treatment of three leading media forms: CD-ROMs, Web sites, and online commercial databases. For anyone who thinks that CD-ROMs are a passing fad in institutional environments in the developed world but appreciates their value for individual users or in the developing world, this chapter is refreshing reading. Head also prepares her reader for predictions about Web design in the book's final chapter. Those who are experienced in Web design and who follow

industry trends will concur that knowledge management has surfaced; intelligent agents have not conquered the world as we hoped; searching has and will become more sophisticated and intelligent, engendering even more optimistic expectations; and finally, that librarians as information professionals have a challenging and exciting future if they take the opportunity to "contribute and accelerate an important dimension to user-centered design, especially through their understanding of information-seeking behavior" (173). This book, full of practical wisdom, insights, and creativity is a "must read" for all information professionals.—*Julia Gelfand (jgelfand@ sun1.lib.uci.edu), University of California, Irvine Library*

Introduction to Vocabularies: Enhancing Access to Cultural Heritage Information. By Elisa Lanzi. Los Angeles: Getty Information Institute, 1998. 62p. $14.95 (ISBN 0-89236-544-7) LC 98-38514. Also available at www.getty.edu/gri/vocabularies/introvocabs.

Introduction to Archival Organization and Description. By Michael J. Fox, Peter L. Wilkerson. Ed. Suzanne Warren. Los Angeles: Getty Information Institute, 1998. 58p. $14.95 (ISBN 0-89236-545-5) LC 98-38502. Also available at www.getty.edu/gri/standard/introarchives.

These two superb compact monographs were published in 1998 as part of the now-defunct Getty Information Institute's "Introduction to" series. They are first-rate in the way they synthesize and explain complex information about the use of vocabulary tools and archival descriptive practices. An outstanding feature of these two books is the diversity of audiences who can benefit from their use. Both are of value to seasoned custodians and students in library and information science, museum studies, and archival